

Mr. Millionaire

While I'm moving I'll be running old tortured-psyche fiction pieces. This one was written in August of 2005, shortly after the first Summer Founders Program ended.

I kiss my girlfriend goodbye before walking down the front steps into the waiting cab. We whir towards the airport. I've done this so many times that the whole act becomes some sort of choreographed dance: step and lift and pull the suitcase, slam the car door and run towards the airport. Wave my card at security and take the express lane.

Onboard the plane, I grab my business class seat and push the seat all the way back, just to remember how it feels. I try to get some sleep but all too soon we're there. I grab my bag and head to pick up my rental car. I toss my luggage in and pretty soon I'm speeding down the beautiful California road.

'Ah, Mr. Delboy,' says the receptionist. 'We've been expecting you.' She leads me to a conference room. I take a seat at the tip of the long table, which stretches all the way down the room, before stopping at a mahogany bookcase whose shelves remain empty. A fluorescent light gives everything that yellow glow. Three older men sit on my left, three older men sit on my right. 'Let's get down to business, Mr. Delboy,' says the first man on my left. 'Please, call me Jules,' I say. 'We've talked it over and we're willing to offer three million.'

I lean back in my chair and laugh. 'Three million?' I say, turning serious. 'Please, I could find three million in my fucking couch. Don't waste my time with this stuff.' I begin to get up. 'No, wait,' cries the first man on the right. 'Will you take five?' I sit back down again. 'Ten,' I say. 'Five and a half,' he says. 'Ten,' I say. 'We'll have to discuss it.'

Back in Massachusetts, I head over to visit my friend Lou. Also a programmer, he was laid off six months ago by a local enterprise consulting company. Judging by the mounting pile of beer bottles, he's had a rough time of it since. He plops down in the couch, absent-mindedly flicking on and off the TV. FOX News pops on. 'God, I hate these twits,' he says. 'And the spineless Dems are no better,' he adds. 'I recently got this fancy-schmancy direct mail survey from them asking what I thought the most important political issue was. There were all the usual options: Iraq war, social security, health care, outsourcing — but what about the poor, man? What about those people whose lives really suck? They keep trying to railroad politics into this safe little issue-oriented bullshit. When is real change going to happen?'

'So, uh, my company is going well,' I say, trying to change the subject. 'Yeah?' he says disinterestedly. 'Yeah, we got offered five but I'm trying to push them to ten.' 'Thousand?' he says. 'Million,' I say. 'Fuck, man,' he says, 'a million dollars? You have any idea how many mouths you can feed with that?' 'Hey man, don't try and pull that hippy bullshit on me, okay? I'm as liberal as anybody. I donate money to MoveOn.org, I read *Nickel and Dimed*, I'm totally with you on that stuff.'

'Shit, Jules, you don't even know what that stuff is. Do you even live in the same world as these people? Five million dollars? Can you even think of what that kind of money means? I mean, sure, to you it means another jet so you can go galavanting around the world but do you ever think about the people that you're flying over?' 'Shut up man, I've got serious stuff to worry about, I don't need to hear your whining.' I look over towards the overflowing mountain of beer bottles. 'Get some help,' I say and walk out.

I'm walking through Harvard Square when my cell phone rings. 'Jules here,' I say. 'Alright man, we've discussed it and we're willing to give you 9 and a half.' 'With what vesting?' I say. '5 in cash, 4 and a half at three years quarterly.' 'Three years?' I say. 'How about two?' 'Deal,' they say. 'Deal,' I say. 'We'll fax over the papers tomorrow.' I snap the phone shut and keep on walking. It's a beautiful day in Cambridge. The sun streams down from overhead, casting a special glow on the minstrels who inhabit the Square and making the colors pop on the tight-fitting tanktops the coeds wear. Jugglers are tossing rings on my right. 'Change please?' calls a hunched over black man on my left, with his battered Starbucks cup extended. I keep on walking but he leaves his perch and starts following me.

'Hey man, can you spare some change? Anything? Please, I need to eat,' he says. I keep walking, but I can't shake him. He gets in front of me, starts pushing up in my face. 'Hey man, I see what you're wearing. Look here — I got myself a total of three bucks, fifty-seven cents. What do you have?' 'Huh?' I say. 'How much money do you have?' I stop walking for a second. The man looks up in my face. 'I said I got three bucks and how much do you have?' he repeats. 'Five,' I stammer, and then it hits me. I crumble to the ground and start sobbing.

'I can't take it,' I sob. 'I'm not cut out for this world. I don't want to be in this world. I don't want to be this person. I don't want to be *me*.' I curl into a ball and start sobbing.

The man with the Starbucks cup backs away and heads back to his perch. And the rest of the sidewalk traffic just keeps on moving, ignoring the sobbing millionaire, lying in the middle of the street.

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November 6, 2006